

Paintings and Other Constructions, Patrick O'Sullivan.

APT Gallery, London. 25th February 13th March 2016.

What is the difference between a sculpture and a painting? Must a painting have a frame? When is a frame not a frame? At what point does a painting become three dimensional? Questions beget questions as the inner pedant is revealed, yet as with most theoretical discussions the answer is elusive, often dependant on the tenacity of the person arguing their point.

Patrick O'Sullivan is too shrewd an artist to take a side in this argument, preferring (wisely) to allow his work to speak for itself. O'Sullivan takes his unique understanding of both painting and sculpture, and combines it with his sharply observed understanding of viewing behaviour to create works that move with pre-possessing ease between both mediums. The works are confident in their hybridity, defying us to deal with them rather than pander to any convention. When confronted with these predominantly wall-based works we're initially struck by their precariousness and the random layering of shapes. Yet as we look further, a considered and precise composition becomes apparent. It is as if these MDF components have been drawn into life on an engineer's or architect's table, each part designed to appear to be doing something it has no physical right to do, whilst simultaneously basking in its own physicality. O'Sullivan teases us with illusion and reassures us with fact in equal measures.

Inherent in these works is a streak of humour borne from the quasi-absurd approach to making – O'Sullivan seems to delight in the pointlessness of the engineering involved. He respectfully alludes to architectural motifs such as shelves, door frames, buildings and so on, before seeking out a solution to a problem that never existed before, and that these decontextualized objects have no business in trying to solve. In doing so, the solution creates the problem, which then solves itself in a strange and surreal tautology. Of course, as we all know (and here the pedant returns) art does not necessarily need a function other than confirming its own existence, and these works certainly do that. And yet, such is the clarity of intent involved in the process of their making, and the instinctive familiarity of the domestic shapes before us, we find ourselves almost in awe of their independence as they wilfully stand before us, content to keep us guessing.

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